

Over the last few weeks I've noticed the buzz word "dysfunctional" is in vogue on talk shows and in political blogs to describe the inability of Washington to come to an agreement over raising the debt ceiling.

While Democracy has been described as the "worst form of government except for the others," I still believe our representative government offers a pretty good reflection of the diverse views of Americans at large. With opinion polls showing the nation largely divided over the politics of raising the debt ceiling, it's not surprising, therefore, that your lawmakers are also at loggerheads.

Take, for example, this past week's down-to-the-wire negotiations over a short-term debt ceiling increase with a matching amount of budget cuts. This second attempt advanced by House Speaker John Boehner as a way to avoid a potential fiscal crisis is a scaled down version of the longer-term "Cut, Cap and Balance" plan that passed the House two weeks ago.

I cosponsored and voted for Cut, Cap and Balance and I also supported Speaker Boehner's short-term "Budget Control Act." Each represents the conservative view – held by many Americans – that any increase in the nation's debt ceiling must be offset with spending cuts. Unfortunately, much like putting together a giant jigsaw puzzle without the benefit of knowing what the picture looks like ahead of time, it has taken longer than any of us would have liked to get a bill over to the Senate for their consideration.

In recent days, my offices have received hundreds of phone calls from Alabamians as well as from many people across America. I always appreciate hearing from the people I work for.

However, since my last name is very often confused with Speaker Boehner's, about a quarter of incoming phone calls to my Capitol Hill office are actually meant for his office. When many of these callers learn they've reached Jo "Bonner" from Alabama, rather than John "Boehner" of Ohio, they still want to leave their opinions. Thanks to an army of great interns from South Alabama, my office is able to field the calls which sometimes come in at the pace of votes for American Idol contestants.

These calls paint a portrait of a country that is generally divided. Each caller – whether from California or Texas, Jackson or East Brewton – is passionate that their view is what it best for our country and they all agree that Congress is not doing its job. It has been interesting to hear some callers describe Speaker Boehner's short-term debt ceiling extension as extreme. Others said it was tantamount to raising the white flag of surrender. Still others said let's just do nothing at all. Having to reconcile these divergent views is not an easy task. And, frankly, in the end a Member of the Congress must make a decision that he or she believes is best for their state and the nation.

Yes, America is divided and so is Congress. Yet, in the end, the public is looking to Congress and the president to come together and do the right thing for the good of the nation. For me, the choice to support both of Speaker Boehner's plans to raise the debt ceiling – only if an equal amount of government spending is achieved – was the right course for our country.

Unfortunately, my first choice, "Cut, Cap and Balance" was rejected by the Senate and President Obama. So, we are now offering the Speaker's short-term plan instead. It is not perfect, but doing nothing at all is no alternative.

Practically everyone who has phoned my office is concerned about America's future and most agree that we cannot proceed with out-of-control spending. They differ on the causes of the spending, but they generally share the conclusion that their government has to stop borrowing 42 cents of every dollar it spends.

Many figures cross my desk each month, but the ones that mean the most to me are the unemployment rates. In June, Alabama's jobless rate was just shy of 10 percent – up from 9.6 percent in May. Clarke and Monroe counties are currently tied with 17.5 percent jobless rates, followed by Washington at 16.2 percent, Escambia at 12.4 percent and Mobile and Baldwin with 11.8 percent and 9.3 percent respectively. Doing nothing means risking the stability of an already fragile economy and jeopardizing current jobs.

We all want our country to succeed. We all want to see new jobs created. And we all want our children's futures to be better than ours. But, at least to me, the way forward to achieve these goals is by passing a responsible agreement that allows an increase in the debt ceiling if the president will match it with spending cuts. In the end, Americans are looking to Washington for statesmanship. It's time for the Senate and the White House to match our efforts.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.

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